



1410 – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Newport News (the City) supports and encourages the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, etc.) to communicate directly with the public, stakeholders, partners, and the media. City use of social media is intended to broaden the reach of communication and engagement with the community, while utilizing new platforms that offer methods of communicating beyond the traditional source of official information located at nngov.com. All social media should be treated as a formal, public communications tool and should be used to:

- Enhance and encourage external communications;
- Educate citizens regarding city services, programs, projects, meetings, events and businesses;
- Increase government transparency and efficiency;
- Engage citizens in community dialogue;
- Respond to inquiries regarding municipal services and government in a timely manner;
- Share posts from other City government social media sites to help promote their programs, events and services;
- Communicate with citizens during inclement weather, emergencies, and man-made disasters; and
- Expand citizen interactivity and participation through online services and resources.

II. PURPOSE

The City has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “spoken” on behalf of the City on social media sites. This policy establishes the procedures for the proper use of social media.

III. POLICY

All City and departmental social media sites shall be (1) approved by the requesting Department Head and the Communications Office in the City Manager’s Office; and (2) administered by the Communications Office or a designee. Designees can be any department employee or volunteer designated by the requesting Department Head that has a complete understanding of this policy and has appropriate content and technical experience. Designees shall provide the Communications Office with full access to City-related social media sites either through the provision of login and password, Administrator rights, or any other method approved by the Communications Office. The Communications Office will notify Departments of any actions involving their sites.

- A. All City and departmental social media sites shall adhere to applicable local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and policies, including the City’s Use of Information Technology Policy and other applicable City policies.

- B. Virginia Freedom of Information Act and e-discovery laws and policies apply to electronic content and therefore all social media content must be able to be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with these laws.
- C. All City and departmental social media sites are subject to the Library of Virginia's (LVA) Public Records Act. Relevant City and LVA records retention schedules apply to social media content. Records required to be maintained pursuant to a relevant record retention schedule shall be maintained for the required retention period in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible using the approved platforms and tools.
- D. Content deemed not suitable for posting by a City or departmental social media moderator and removed from social media sites shall be retained pursuant to the records retention schedule along with a description of the reason the specific content is deemed not suitable for posting.
- E. The City and its departments reserve the right to restrict or limit the subject matter of their social media sites, and remove any content that is not within the permissible subject areas, or in violation of this policy, or any applicable law. However, comments and postings by the public which may fall outside the subject area limitations imposed by a particular City department but which relate to other City departments, City business or operations, should be referred to the Communications Office for appropriate response including a referral to the correct department.
- F. All City and departmental social media sites shall, where appropriate, have the City's posting policy permanently displayed. *See Section VI. Posting Policy.*
- G. All social media sites shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the City and shall have City contact information prominently displayed.
- H. Employees representing the City government via social media platforms must conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the City and in accordance with all Human Resources administrative policies. *See Section IV, Employee Guidance for Participation in Social Media.*
- I. The Communications Office may monitor content on social media sites to ensure adherence with this policy - and ensure consistent citywide messages. The Communications Office retains the authority to remove pages or close sites if necessary.
- J. Employees found in violation of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

IV. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Employees who are authorized to participate in City social media sites as a City employee spokesperson shall adhere to the following:

- A. All City policies, rules, regulations, and standards of conduct apply to employees that engage in social media activities while conducting City business. Use of a City e-mail address and communicating in an official capacity constitutes conducting City business. All posts and responses to posts made on the City's behalf shall be done through a City account, not a personal one.

All requests to establish a social networking site to conduct City business shall be made to the Communications Office in the City Manager's Office after receiving Department Head approval.

- B. Department Heads have the option of allowing employees to participate in existing City social media sites as part of their job duties.
- C. Employees shall not write any content or postings that involve or are related to the following:
- Potential or actual litigation, including administrative proceedings, involving the City or its employees.
 - Nonpublic information of any kind.
 - Illegal or banned substances and narcotics.
 - Pornography or other offensive illegal materials.
 - Defamatory, libelous, offensive or demeaning material. Don't engage in a combative exchange.
 - Private/personal matters of yourself or others.
 - Disparaging/threatening comments about or related to anyone.
 - Personal, sensitive or confidential information of any kind.
 - Medical information that violates a person's Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protections
- D. Follow all copyright laws, public record laws, retention laws, fair use and financial disclosure laws and any other laws that might apply to the City or functional area.
- E. Do not cite vendors, suppliers, clients, residents, co-workers or other stakeholders without their approval.
- F. Do not use ethnic slurs, profanity, personal insults or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the City's workplace. Avoid comments or topics that may be considered objectionable, inflammatory, or discriminatory.
- G. Correct mistakes, and do not alter previous posts without indicating a change has been made. Frame any comments or opposing views in a positive manner.
- H. Add value to the City through your interaction. Provide worthwhile information and perspective.

- I. Make it clear you are speaking for yourself and not the City government on non-City social media platforms. If you identify yourself as a City employee on social media platforms outside of the City of Newport News social media sites and publish content that relates to your work or subjects associated with the City, use a disclaimer such as, "The views expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the City of Newport News' positions, strategies, or opinions."

V. ADDITIONAL TIPS

- A. Be timely
 - When responding to comments and posts, do so in a timely fashion and with an accurate response. Not all posts, however, require a response.
- B. Be regular
 - Establish a habit of posting regularly to social media accounts. On the other hand, don't inundate your audience with excessive and/or irrelevant messages.
- C. Be transparent
 - Your honesty, or dishonesty, will be quickly noticed in social media environments.
- D. Perception is reality
 - In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional can be blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a Newport News employee, you are creating perceptions about the City. Be sure all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with the City's values and professional standards.
- E. Be judicious
 - All statements must be true and not misleading and all claims must be substantiated and approved. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully. Don't publish anything you wouldn't want your family, coworker, clergy, or supervisor to read!
- F. Your responsibility
 - What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social computing on behalf of the City is not a right and access may be removed. Posting needs to be taken seriously and with respect.

G. It's a conversation

- Talk to your readers like you'd talk to real people in professional situations. Avoid bureaucratic or formal language. Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality. Consider open-ended content that invites response and comments. Stay professional – don't be combative.

H. Bring it back

- Whenever possible include links on social media sites that direct users back to the City's website for more information.

I. Be open

- One of the great benefits of social media is the interaction between us (you) and our customers. Take in ideas. Share relevant feedback & input with relevant colleagues.

J. If it gives you pause, pause

- If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take a minute to review this policy and try to figure out what's bothering you, then, fix it. If you're still unsure, check with your supervisor or the Communications Office. Ultimately, the decision about what you publish is yours – as is the responsibility.

VI. POSTING POLICY

All of the following information shall be provided at each site:

Welcome to the official City [or Department of [X]] [name of social media outlet].

The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in Newport News. Followers of the City of Newport News are encouraged to submit questions, comments, and concerns, but please note that this is a moderated online discussion site.

Here is our Posting Policy for participation to encourage civil discourse. The following is prohibited:

- personal attacks or threats against other users or individuals; libelous, harassing or abusive statements;
- conduct which constitutes or encourages illegal activity;
- submission of personal information or likenesses of other persons without their consent;
- comments as to individuals or groups based on race, age, national origin, gender, sexuality, religion, or other classification that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination;

- content that is obscene, profane, or sexually explicit. This includes masked words (**), acronyms and abbreviations;
- commercial product promotions not authorized by the City or messages; spam, links to other sites, chain letters, pyramid schemes or fraudulent or deceptive messages; false claims of affiliation with any third party;
- information affiliated with, promoting, or opposing political campaigns or ballot measures;
- copyright infringing material, or any material which could result in infringement of any third party intellectual property or privacy; and
- comments not topically related to the particular social media article being commented upon, or beyond the scope of the subject matter of the social media site.

Note:

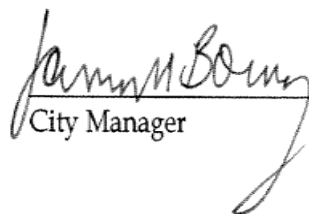
The Communications Office will have the final say in interpreting these rules. Once posted, the City reserves the right to reject, delete, disable or remove any content that we determine, in our sole discretion, (a) does not comply with these Posting Guidelines; (b) might violate any law, infringe upon any rights of third parties, or subject us to liability for any reason; (c) should be taken down for any other legitimate business reason that does not infringe upon any person's First Amendment rights.

Disclaimer:

Please note that public comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinion and position of the City of Newport News government or its officers and employees. If you have any questions concerning the operation of this online moderated discussion site, please contact Communications and Community Relations at city@nngov.com.

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Approved:



City Manager